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Towards an Understanding of the Politicization of Lumpenproletariat: A Dramaturgical First Look

David Montejano

University of California - Berkeley, montejano@berkeley.edu

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TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF
THE POLITICIZATION OF LUMPENPROLETARIAT:
A DRAMATURGICAL FIRST LOOK

DAVID MONTEJANO

Sociology,
Yale University

This paper has some modest goals--modest if only because the analysis presented here is admittedly tentative and incomplete.¹ This paper should be viewed rather as an attempt to work out some ideas in a perhaps uncommon way. The dramaturgical approach suggested here emerged in a "grounded" manner in the course of my participant-observation experiences with a Brown Beret chapter in its formative period. The significance of appearance was clearly indicated by the consistent emphasis on uniform dress and, in particular, on the wearing of the beret. What made such emphasis sociologically important and interesting, however, were the organizational dynamics associated with the dramaturgy of uniform dress. Two aspects of this relation should be mentioned here.

On the one hand, the uniform and especially the beret proved to be an effective visible cue for attracting public attention. Even among people who did not know what the beret represented, there generally was a minimal reaction such as stares, smiles, frowns, winks, disapproving nods, and so forth. A dramaturgically significant feature of wearing the beret lay in this everyday vulnerability to public reaction.

On the other, personal behavior varied according to whether one was in "dress" or in street clothes. Considering that the membership was overwhelmingly recruited from the barrios's street-corner or vacant-lot society, such behavioral code switching would seem to be an important "middle" ground where batos locos socialized to everyday street life could acquire a public presentation of self.² Wearing the beret, then, not

only identified one publicly and thus made one vulnerable to public reaction, but simultaneously regulated code switching between "offstage" (private) and "frontstage" (public) behavior.

It should be emphasized that my argument concerning behavioral code switching is simply that it was necessary for a group composed of *lumpenproletariat* interested in presenting themselves as a political organization. I do not argue: (1) that such a middle ground is a transitory state, for the batos could (and did) either continue being politicized or return to their former street life; or (2) that behavioral code switching signifies politicization. The relation of code switching as well as of public visibility with politicization occurs indirectly through the complex group dynamics of an emerging political organization. The immediate task of the present paper is to delineate the dynamics revolving about the organization's major symbol, a brown beret. A dramaturgical analogy offers, then, a promising and parsimonious manner of presenting one important dimension involved in the politicization of this lumpenproletariat group.³

THE CHAPTER INTRODUCED

Only a few veteran members remained active Brown Berets after a serious and extensive personal conflict had caused the large city-wide Beret organization to disintegrate in the Spring of 1974. The conflict had been a serious setback. The organization no longer maintained its headquarters, an abandoned house which the Berets had occupied and fixed some two years before. More importantly, the experienced leadership which had created a network of organizational contacts over these two years were also gone. Nonetheless, Miguel and Paco, brothers and leaders of their local neighborhood chapter (the city-wide organization consisted of such local chapters), were determined to maintain the organization. Miguel, who now considered himself the jefe of the organization, began a recruitment campaign. Within two weeks, ten new members were recruited, a group which together with Miguel and Paco would constitute the core membership on which this present research is based.⁴

In order to facilitate discussion, an organizational roster (names are fictitious) with some biographical information follows. Where applicable, two ranks are shown--the first indicating the rank at which the individual entered the group, the second indicating his final rank. A single rank listing indicates no mobility during the research period. Concerning occupational information, the last specific job is listed in the case of those unemployed. "Unskilled laborer" is used whenever one's work was identified as highly transient and described in general terms (e.g., construction work, dishwashing).

List 1

Organizational Roster of Brown Beret
Chapter Under Research

Name	Age	Position	Occupation
Core Group:			
*Miguel	29 yrs.	prime minister	occupational therapist's aide
*Paco	32	lieutenant	unemployed house painter
Javalina	28	sgt.--major	aircraft painter
Memo	25	private--major	unemployed truck driver
Pancho	24	private--major	unemployed elevator operator
Monte	27	major	sociologist
Fat Louie	19	private--sgt.	unemployed unskilled laborer
Skinny Louie	16	private	unemployed unskilled laborer
Gibo	19	private	unemployed unskilled laborer
Rafael	20	private	unemployed unskilled laborer
Lopez	20	private	body and fender man
Giant	26	private	shoe shine man
Later Core Members:			
Tino	30 yrs.	major	machinist
Red	27	sgt.	unemployed semi-skilled laborer
Jorge	21	(refused rank)	college freshman
Peripheral Group (most stable):			
*Beto	26 yrs.	major	nurse's aide
*Turo	24	major--sgt.	Army private
*Tono	28	major	unemployed railroad laborer
Manuel	29	no rank	unemployed unknown
Pedro	53	no rank	semi-employed house painter
Mexicles	24	no rank	unskilled laborer
**Mique	30	no rank	unknown

Source: Field notes.

*Veteran members.

**Ex-Beret with rank of major.

A few additional points should be made in order to complete an elementary introduction to the Berets. The berets used by the organization were made in France and could be bought only at one military store--a rather obscure one at that--in the entire state. Fortunately for this chapter this store was in town. It wasn't uncommon to have Beret members from out-of-town chapters drive several hundred miles round-trip in order to buy berets. The accoutrements of the beret were one set of crossed rifles, centered and placed two fingers above the head band, and a parche--the emblem of the organization--which had to be sewn slightly to the left of the crossed rifles, four fingers above the head band. Any rank insignia had to be placed immediately above the crossed rifles.

This--a fully dressed beret--constituted the minimal uniform. The brown military jacket was deemed optional. The cost outlay--which varied, since the store owner knew well he had a monopoly--could be considerable:

brown beret.	\$2.50
crossed rifles75
rank insignia.	<u>.75</u>
	\$4.00 minimum
military jacket.	<u>8.50</u> (optional)
	\$12.50

The parche itself has an interesting history and symbolism, which unfortunately could only be alluded to in this paper. What is important to know is that, at the time of this research, these parches could no longer be obtained from the manufacturer with whom the Berets had contracted previously. This meant that new Beret members had to compete with each other for the fully dressed beret of a veteran member who had been "kicked out" or had withdrawn from the organization.

METHODOLOGY

In discussing the dramaturgy or symbolism of dress, some obvious questions which can be used to guide content analysis suggest themselves. Who can wear this symbol? What rules govern its wearing? What does the wearing or non-wearing do? Finally, What does this symbol mean for the user? These questions were basic criteria in reviewing references to the beret and uniform extracted from my field notes. Several reviews of this collection were made in attempting to cluster the references into qualitatively distinct categories which would focus on the visibility of the beret as an organizational symbol and on the process of behavioral code switching. The working category schema which finally crystallized classified the reference items in the following manner: statements or observations which: (1) associated public Beret behavior with the wearing of the beret (frontstage); (2) referred to the wearing of the beret and associated public reaction (visibility); (3) were directed towards the proper wear of the beret (rules of appearance); (4) referred to the organizational control of the beret as a symbol (distributional control); (5) indicated the personal feelings of a member towards the beret (cathetic commitment); (6) indicated the organizational definition of the beret (formal meaning); and (7) could not be classified into the preceding six categories (a residual category).

Since I believed that the dramaturgical arguments to be presented, if valid, should be able to withstand a rigorous control over the content analysis of my field notes, the procedure in which statements and observations were codified was operationally conservative. This means, specifically three

things: (1) only those references which occurred in a group context were coded. Statements and observations which involved only the researcher and one other individual were, for the present paper, excluded. (2) Only those references which explicitly indicated wearing of the uniform or beret were coded; this is a particularly important point, we shall see, when discussing frontstage behavior. Since a public performance for a Beret means wearing at minimum the beret, one could argue that all references to frontstage behavior was at least an indirect reference to beret use. Again, for the sake of avoiding any over-interpretation, statements and observations which implied, however strongly, the wearing of the uniform were excluded in the present paper. (3) Each statement or observation was attributed a value of one unit. Although an event may consist of several statements alluding to the beret, each statement was weighted as one unit and thus, coded independently of the other statements. Naturally, many statements were ambiguous in the artificial sense that they referred to two or more of the categories constructed above. As a general rule, all statements were classified under that category to which it most clearly belonged. In those cases where two or even more categories were more or less equally indicated, the unit value of the statement was distributed evenly among the relevant categories.⁵

It may be well at this point, for the purposes of concretely demonstrating the coding procedure outlined above and for describing the dramaturgy revolving about the use of the beret, to present some relevant passages from my fieldnotes. For the sake of condensed but coherent presentation, the "raw" fieldnote excerpts have been rewritten, and the dialogues translated from the barrio argot of the bato loco. The excerpts are all taken from the period of "mobilization," the period when the new recruits and this researcher were being introduced to the organization. In this manner, the initial socialization experiences can be simulated, however poorly, for the reader.

REVISED NOTES

Learning About the Beret: A Grounded Approach
15 Agosto, 7:30 p.m.-2 a.m.

Gathered outside in a vacant lot adjacent to a community center, the new members are told by Juanillo, a visiting veteran officer from another chapter, not to worry about not knowing all about la raza or the Berets; they would learn in a short time. Paco, who would emerge as the educator and philosopher of the group, similarly says that it isn't necessary to know all the "movimiento stuff," only that one follow the idea of carnalismo, especially when it comes to defending other Berets. A Beret has to be ready to die for the cause,

his people, and his fellow Berets. At the end of an impressive monologue, Paco says in reference to his beret "anyone who wants to take my beret will have to take the skin off my head" [me tienen que quitar el cuero de mi cabeza].⁶

Discussing the security the Berets will provide for a conference of illegal aliens, Paco makes the first reference to behavior as a Beret emphatically: "Don't show up stoned or drunk because the people attending the conference, especially the mojados are putting their lives on the line."⁷

La Javalina, an ambitious garrulous recruit who would later rise to be second in command, apparently has his own preconceptions of what being a Beret means. While drinking some beers in a cantina, he remarks to two other recruits that he can't wait to have the beret on so he can go back to El Club 45 (another tavern) to make up for the time he was chased from there.⁸

17 Agosto, 1:30 a.m.-8:30 p.m.

Some have asked me when am I going to buy my beret . . . apparently my ambiguous status as a non-Beret is puzzling.⁹

Paco enforces the rule that no drinking or smoking be done until after the conference ends for the day . . . It's interesting to see Paco also enforce the important rituals of the organization. He criticizes La Javalina and Memo, both of whom are wearing their berets for the first time, for the stems on their berets. "Se ven como chefs." He also shows them how their pants should be pegged around the boots, and shows them how to do the Chicano handshake properly.¹⁰

A Beret is severely criticized for having left his beret on the ground.¹¹

18 Agosto, 3 p.m.-12:30 a.m.

I got to know La Javalina better today . . . in the morning when we went to buy some beers, he told me what I had missed (at the conference) last night . . . Java is happy and proud that the rucas wanted to take pictures with the Berets yesterday . . . lots of pictures [chingos]¹² . . . and he mentions this conversation he had with an old man who said he was tired of talk--he wanted action and that's why he liked the Berets . . .¹³

Javalina also tells me that there almost was pedo last night when a drunk Chicano Marine walked through the middle of the security line the Berets had posted and said, "Those are funny uniforms."¹⁴ Java says that he answered him saying, "Hey carnal, we're the Brown Berets," but another Beret started hechando madres. The drunk Marine returns the insults, and other Berets join in the racla. Paco and a friend of the Marine break up the racla. Paco angrily demands, "How is he (the Marine) going to learn about the Berets if you insult

him?" The Berets, however, are still laughing at the drunk Marine. They don't stop until Paco, even more angrily, demands that they give him their berets.¹⁵ "The Berets have to educate the people, not insult their mothers."¹⁶

I told Paco that he had done well when he spoke before the conference yesterday (Paco had been concerned about his presentation). Paco seemed pleased and accepted my comment, mentioning that when he spoke it was very difficult not to let out *madres y chingaderas*.¹⁷ He reminisces about a political rally at which he also had spoken. From the podium he had told the people about the candidate, "I don't like Jimmy at all, but he's *raza* and we have to work together. If he wins and he doesn't help the people, we're (the Berets) going to meterle una chingada en su culo." And the people just kept applauding. Paco said he later saw a picture taken while he was speaking and that it looked *bien de aquellas*: "flanked on both sides by two Berets with full uniform, their trousers bloused, their berets, and their sunglasses."¹⁸

19 Agosto

While walking downtown, a bato sees us (three Berets) and stops us, saying that he wants to join the *raza unida*. Miguel tells him that we're Berets, and the guy says he wants to join and that he knows a group of ex-pintos who hang around behind the church on Perez Street who want to join.¹⁹

21 Agosto, 7:30 p.m.-11:30 p.m.

La Javalina says that last night he was accosted in a cantina by a bato (who turns out to be an ex-Beret) because Java didn't have the *parche* of *carnalismo* on his beret and the guy thought that Java was mimicing the organization. The bato left him alone when he saw Miguel, whom he knew as the Prime Minister of the group, standing outside waiting for Java.²⁰

Miguel tells the new recruits about the Berets' rules. "If a Beret gets drunk with his beret on or gets arrested for some pedo that he got involved in, the Berets will let him stay in jail--you better not expect us to take you out . . . moreover, if a bato gets in trouble often, if he smears the name of the organization [*chotea*] for something not related to the Berets, or if he doesn't come to meetings, we will expel him from the group after a hearing before all the members."²¹

In discussion plans to recruit in a small town tomorrow, Miguel warns, "everyone has to behave very well in the small towns . . . the people there pay a lot of attention to how one behaves . . . the Berets who *cagen el palo* will have to answer to the rest of us."²²

23 Agosto, 6:30 p.m.-1 a.m.

Gibo criticizes his brother (who was a Beret for only a short time) because Jesús wanted Gibo to take off his beret on their way home and Gibo had responded by insisting that Jesús should not be ashamed.²³

We arrive in the small town where Miguel said some batos were interested in forming a Beret chapter. (Actually the alambre Miguel had received was much in the same manner as that of 19 of August--a chance meeting cued by the visibility of the uniform.) No one, however, is at the ice station which was the rendezvous point. The ten Berets are milling outside the ice station wondering what to do next while Paco and Miguel rap about the disappointments we will have to face working with the people. Soon, however, we begin attracting attention. A car full of batos had circled the block to look at us and had returned with other cars. Soon ten cars full of batos from the town have converged on the ice house and Miguel is talking with apparent clique leaders about what we're doing in that town. None of the batos had heard anything about the scheduled meeting, but that didn't matter anymore--contact had been made. Meanwhile the town police car has circled the block several times.²⁴

Having been led to their hang-out on a country road outside town, the ten Berets begin mingling with the twenty or so batos from the town. It's an impressive sight as the Berets in introducing themselves begin educating the batos in the ritual of the Chicano handshake and in calling each other carnales--rituals which most Berets have just learned in the past few days. La Javalina shouts for all to gather around the back of a pickup truck and for whoever wants to speak to get up on the pickup. Both Java and Miguel jumped onto the pickup. Miguel introduces his soldados and begins talking about the significance of the beret. "The color of the beret is brown because we, la gente chicana, are brown. The brown circle of the parche represents the world of all the bronze people; the red background of the parche represents the blood which Chicanos have lost in Vietnam and in gang fights in the streets; the eagle because we support the farmworkers' strike of César Chávez; and the hands shaking because we believe in carnalismo. A Chicano should not raise his hand against another Chicano. On the contrary we should help ourselves, so united we can fight the gringo."²⁵

On the way home, Fat Louie mentions that one of the batos had confused them with the Green Berets but that he had corrected the bato.²⁶ La Java gets on my case for not having bought a beret.²⁷

25 Agosto

Paco spends about 45 minutes trying to fit a beret on me.²⁸ In saying something about the beret, I refer to it as a cachucha and Paco quickly and firmly corrects me--"It's *NOT* a cap; it's a beret."²⁹

I write the first set of theoretical notes on the importance of the beret as a visible symbol.³⁰

DISCUSSION

Having shown the series of events through which I became aware of and learned the significance of the beret, its sociological import can now be discussed more systematically. From forty-five entries in my field notes, totaling 125 single-spaced typed pages, ninety-nine items were coded and classified as follows.

Statements or Observations Referring to:

Frontstage	9.5
Visibility	12.5
Appearance	32
Control	20
Commitment	12
Definition	5
Other	<u>8</u>
	99

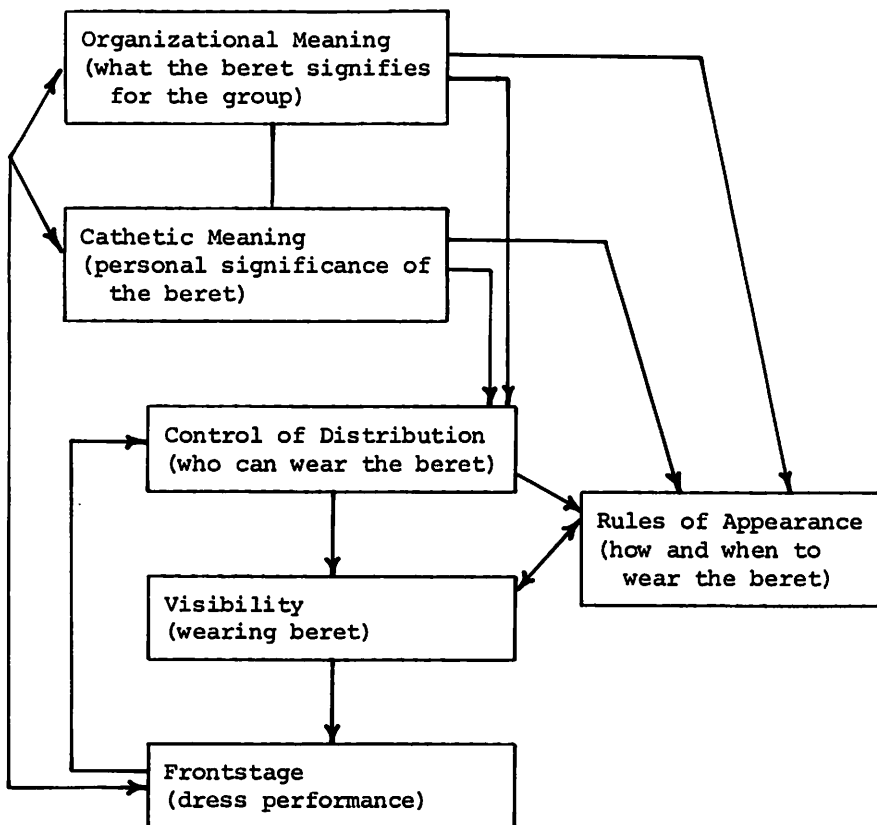
Some methodological comments about the coding are in order.³¹ It is evident that the conservative manner of reviewing fieldnotes excluded much relevant information. There were numerous references to frontstage behavior and public reaction which did not explicitly indicate beret wearing. A persuasive argument can be proposed that since being a Beret was publicly indicated by wearing a beret, any statement regarding public behavior as an organizational member implied beret use. A similar argument can be made for the public reaction Berets received--any such reaction generally presupposed identification or recognition, which in turn was cued by beret wearing. It is with the intention of proposing these arguments, however, that the discussion in the present paper restricts itself to statements and observations which explicitly and directly associate beret use with public behavior and public reaction. For the moment it should be merely noted that the frequencies of coded frontstage and visibility items are not representative. The same caveat applies to the number of coded items indicating cathetic commitment. What can be said with some certainty is that the "rules of appearance" and "organizational control" regarding the beret exhaust the relevant "universe" of items in my fieldnotes. The rules of appearance apply only to the uniform and particularly to the beret. Organizational

control of the beret, though employed as a group sanction upon deviant members, refers to the distribution of the beret as an organizational symbol and in this sense is unambiguous.

In order to simplify discussion and suggest the scope of the argument in this paper, a model suggesting the logical relations between the coded categories can be proposed. Although quite crude at this point, refinement will occur as the data analysis is presented.

Figure 1

A Simple, Logical Construct of the
Dramaturgy of the Beret



In the present paper, the discussion will be largely limited to an analysis and refinement of the relations between visibility and frontstage behavior.

THE CONSTRAINTS OF FRONTSTAGE BEHAVIOR

The private "offstage" behavior of batos locos has been alluded to in the excerpts presented above and discussed at length in descriptions of similar street-corner groups. The personal freedom afforded by vacant-lot invisibility and individual anonymity means that the bato "puede hacer lo que le de la gana." Such freedom may be restricted by the peer group, but generally these restrictions do not include following the encumbrances of conventional public etiquette.³² In the social world of the bato loco, then, freely expressed behavior may run the gamut of conventional to unconventional conduct and may evoke group sanctions as well as approval. The off-stage behavior of particular interest here is that group-approved conduct which is labelled as unconventional. Specifically, this refers to such everyday street behavior as cursing, however casually, shooting the finger (a body curse), wolfing at women, pissing in public, touching one's genitals, getting drunk or stoned, using drugs, dressing unconventionally (leaving one's shirt unbuttoned, hitching one's pants, even wearing sunglasses), fighting, and any other behavior which may be termed "disrespectful."³³

Why a group of batos locos should give up some of their personal freedom and attempt to acquire a public "face" is a question beyond the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say that the batos in the Brown Berets saw themselves as members of an organization and not a gang--that is, a group with "public" as opposed to "private" goals. This distinction is an extremely important one, and one that most Berets were always quick to make in differentiating their present status from their past biographies as gang fighters, tecatos, felons, or pachucos. Aware that their "gang" label still followed them, conventional frontstage behavior was basic to supporting their claim of personal change. One could argue, in fact, that a most effective strategy of demonstrating such change is to draw attention to it--in other words, to make one's present behavior highly visible. Aside the pejorative labelling which the Berets had to counter even within its own barrio, conventional behavior was, of course, functionally important for the organization's effectiveness. An organization could hardly afford to alienate the very people it wished to organize, educate, defend, and which might be the source of the few resources the organization could rely upon. Some examples were presented earlier--Paco in the incident of the drunk Marine, Miguel in his frontstage instructions for the recruitment trip. Perhaps a more critical reason, however, was the fact, dramatically illustrated months before through the disintegration of the city-wide Beret organization, that offstage behavior--particularly fighting, getting drunk or drugged--was dysfunctional for the organization's very survival. But such functional requisites, while important, are by themselves

inadequate in explaining the significance of frontstage etiquette for the Beret organization. A voluntary association with virtually no material rewards, it is perhaps not unexpected that the most explicit rationale the Berets had for maintaining frontstage behavior was ideological. Ideological commitment was overlaid upon the organization's functional needs--an overlay strikingly suggested by the brief preamble to the rules of the Beret chapter:

In order for an organization such as ours to survive, we must have a love for our people, dedication, and discipline. If you really love your people, you yourself will straighten out . . . EL CARNALISMO UNE . . . NO SEPARA.

The constraints, then, created and enforced by a group seeking to establish and maintain itself as an organization, were based upon a combination of ideological, functional, and biographical reasons. What explicitly were these frontstage proscriptions? The rules of the chapter provide a convenient summary:³⁴

Any member of the organization found guilty of breaking any of these rules, is subject to disciplinary action and will either be put on probation or permanently terminated from the organization.

- (1) Every member will attend all called meetings, rallies, pickets, or demonstrations.
.....
- (3) Every Brown Beret will be in uniform at all Brown Beret functions.
.....
- (5) Under no circumstances will a Brown Beret indulge in the possession, sale, use, or distribution of hard drugs.
- (6) While in uniform, no Brown Beret will be seen in public while heavily intoxicated.
- (7) It is an absolute must that all Brown Berets preach "Carnalismo."
.....
- (9) Under no circumstances will a Brown Beret raise his fist against another Chicano, unless in self-defense.
- (10) All Brown Berets will show respect for each other and to the people at all times.
.....
- (12) Every Brown Beret will always look, and act his best.
.....

Besides the right of self-defense, there was another rule--an unwritten one--which exempted one from maintaining carnalismo. As Paco succinctly informed us one evening (18 Sept.), "A Beret can fight but he should fight for only three reasons--for his waifa, his jefita, and for his beret." In view of the conspicuous emphasis on the ideology of carnalismo, what can this unwritten rule signify? That a beret is as important, or nearly so, as one's wife and mother? That as a material interest, defending one's beret overrides any ideological commitment to carnalismo? In what sense does Paco's "unless" clause to the tenet of carnalismo actually make sense?

THE IDEOLOGY OF DRESS

If ideology is the most explicit rationale for motivating a conventionally acceptable frontstage performance, then one would suspect that the beret may be infused with ideological import which, in turn, would underscore its significance as a dramaturgical cue. The data on this point is interesting.

As has been suggested in various places throughout this paper, if there was any single ideological belief most forcefully and consistently articulated in Beret gatherings and functions, it was belief in the concept of carnalismo--a revolutionary idea of brotherhood for those who had become accustomed to live, and had learned to live well, in an everyday world of conflict. That the beret was emblazoned with the parche of carnalismo was, of course, significant: acquisition of the beret signified, however vague other ideological notions may have been and may have remained, a basic, unambiguous commitment to carnalismo. If this commitment represented a major biographical event, it would be expected that some cathexis should occur about the beret. Miguel, for one, indicated as much. Explaining why one should respect the beret, he said simply, "the beret means more than the crucifix to me, because when I was a Christian I was going around plomando at my people, and when I became a Beret I stopped doing that." (Oct. 5) Such cathexis could occur for a number of reasons other than a major biographical change--commitment to the group, attraction to an individual member, discovery of a sense of purpose in life, expectations of some great historical event, and so on. But it was generally more common that an expression of commitment did not indicate its underlying motivation. For example, Pancho, who by this time had replaced Java as Minister of Discipline, expressed the type of commitment that often drew much approval from veteran Beret members.

Pancho, Miguel, and I are talking about the Beret jacket --a very scarce piece of uniform--which Pancho has on. . . . As if explaining why he has it instead of someone else, Pancho says to me "yo me muero Beret." Miguel traces the

history of the jacket--from José to Daniel to Java and now to Pancho. Tongue in cheek, I comment "so everyone who has worn this jacket has left the Berets" . . . Miguel gives a responsive grin, the toothless grin he always gives when he hears an idea that "connects" . . . but Pancho replies solemnly "they'll have to kill me to get this jacket off me." (Dec. 29)

Even such explicit statements of commitment to the beret or Beret uniform were rare, however. Reviewing both the items of commitment and definition, we see that Miguel and Paco, the veteran chapter leaders, had an overwhelming share of the total statements expressed.

Table 1

Distribution of Commitment and Definition Statements
to Beret Members

Commitment (Date)			Definition (Date)	
Miguel	1	(Oct. 5)*	3	(Ago. 23)
Paco	4.5	(Ago. 15)	1	(Ago. 25)
Gibo	.5	(Ago. 23)	-	
Fat Louie	1	(Oct. 6)	-	
Memo	1	(Oct. 21)	-	
Pancho	<u>1</u>	(Dic. 29)	<u>-</u>	
9 (12 total)			4 (5 total)	

*Dates in parentheses indicate the earliest (or perhaps only) time that a category statement or observation was recorded in my fieldnotes.

Does such an uneven distribution mean, then, that the beret is invested with some ideological import mainly by the chapter's two primary leaders? That in some sense the dramaturgy of the beret is created and sustained by only two members of a Brown Beret organization? Unfortunately these are questions which can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed here. Reviewing the remaining categorized items for which individual members can be identified, however, suggests a different emphasis, if not alternative explanation (see Table 2). Comparing the distribution and dates of items in all four categories, two tendencies appear: (1) more Berets were involved with the rules of appearance and expressed explicit statements, either informative or proscriptive, concerning them than any other aspect of the beret; and (2) the rules of appearance were the first set of characteristics of the beret which members articulated.

Table 2

Distribution of Control and Appearance Statements
to Beret Members

	Control	(Date)	Appearance	(Date)
Miguel	2	(Nov. 6) *	3.5	(Sep. 22)
Paco	2.5	(Ago. 18)	4	(Ago. 17)
Java	6	(Sep. 18)	4.5	(Ago. 23)
Gibo	1	(Nov. 6)	4.5	(Ago. 23)
Fat Louie	1	(Sep. 22)	1	(Sep. 22)
Skinny Louie	2	(Sep. 22)	1	(Sep. 25)
Rafael	1	(Nov. 15)	-	
Panchl	1	(Ener. 8)	2	(Sep. 19)
Memo	-		2.5	(Sep. 22)
	16.5	(20 total)	23	(32 total)

*The earliest date that a category statement or observation was recorded in my field notes.

In one sense, then, the learning experience of an organization in its formative period is suggested: members learn first the ritualism of an organization, and the boundaries and meaning of the rituals later. On the other hand, ritualism does not necessarily signify any less commitment but perhaps signifies only a different level or type of articulation of what a symbol represents to an individual. Looking at the clustering of items from an organizational perspective suggests yet another explanation. Miguel and Paco, besides the fact that they were the only veteran core members of the chapter, were also the individuals responsible for representing the organization and educating its members. Similarly, organizational control of beret distribution rested in the formalized position of Minister of Discipline, which Java filled during most of the research period. Concerning the rules of appearance, where we have the most even distribution of items among members, no specialized position charged with the enforcement of these rules existed, and the only pattern that emerged here (not shown) was that one never criticized his superiors for their dress.

Returning to the questions which headed this discussion, a cautious answer can be proposed. It does appear true that the ideological import of the beret is primarily articulated by two veteran officers, but this says little of the ideological commitment expressed through the sometimes militant concern with the ritualism and control of the beret as an organizational symbol. At this point, without more extensive data

analysis, I can say no more. What the implications of a ritualistic interest possibly devoid of substantive ideological understanding are for the process of politicization will be briefly discussed later. It should be clear, however, that in one sense it makes no difference for the dramaturgical dynamics created by a visible organizational symbol. Whether it is ideology, ritual, or some other in-group process that effects a public presentation, it is the visibility of such a presentation that catalyzes the interaction between audience, the team of actors, and the individual actor himself.

THE BERET AS A DRAMATURGICAL CUE

As mentioned previously, the dramaturgical significance of the beret lies in the fact that visibility simultaneously (1) places in effect the frontstage proscriptions of the organization for the uniformed member, and (2) makes the uniformed member vulnerable to public reaction, both favorable and adverse. We are now in the position where a review of the items of "visibility" and "frontstage" can suggest modifications in the simple dramaturgical model presented earlier. The items of visibility can be summarized as follows:

(a) Java wants to go to cantina w/bb on to make for fight (Ago. 18)5
(b) Drunk Marine says "those are funny uniforms" (Ago. 18)	1
(c) Bato loco recognizes Berets, wants to join (Ago. 19)	1
(d) Bato loco misidentifies us as the Green Berets (Ago. 23)	1
(e) Beto says we can't wear berets to sensitive meeting (Sep. 22)	1
(f) Memo once thought the Berets were clowns (Sep. 26)	1
(g) Miguel, Java discuss why can't wear berets in Mexico (Oct. 1)	1
(h) Policeman stops us to find out what we're doing (Oct. 4)	1
(i) Police 'copter follows grp. walking thru town (Oct. 5)	1
(j) Batos fighting at dance recognized as Berets (Oct. 27)	1
(k) Speakers at public mtg. piqued at Java's sleeping (Nov. 10)	1
(l) Policeman says "why don't you put your funny hats on" (Nov. 20)	1
(m) At public rally Paco asked to lead spontaneous protest (Dic. 29)	1

Clustered, these items can be fitted into five categories:

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| (1) general negative reaction | (b,f,k,l) |
| (2) social control | (g,h,i,l) |
| (3) positive reaction | (c,m) |
| (4) visibility of both "good" and "bad" frontstage behavior | (a,j,k,m) |
| (5) beret switching (on-off) | (e,g) |
| uncoded: | (d) |

Neither the first three categories nor the last can be accommodated within the simple dramaturgical model. The notion of "vulnerability," however, appears to adequately represent a commonality of these four categories: negative reaction, social control, and positive reaction certainly express events independent of the actor's or team's control, and beret switching is apparently contingent upon perception of possible negative reaction. Before adding schematically the aspect of vulnerability, let us review the items of frontstage behavior to see what other features must be included in a revised model. The items of frontstage can be presented as follows:

- | | |
|---|----|
| (a) Java wants to go to cantina to make up for fight (Ago. 15) | .5 |
| (b) Miguel warns grp. about behavior with beret on (Ago. 21) | 1 |
| (c) Rule passed that if drunk, take off beret (Sep. 18) | 1 |
| (d) Pedro says "not to shoot fingers in public w/bb on" (Oct. 5) | 1 |
| (e) Juanillo says "treat women respectfully when have bb on" (Oct. 5) | 1 |
| (f) Java says that particular chapter looks undisciplined (Oct. 6) | .5 |
| (g) Miguel takes bbs off two Berets about to fight at dance (Oct. 27) | 1 |
| (h) Java will take off bb from any publicly drunk Beret (Nov. 6) | 1 |
| (i) Miguel: Bbs must be educated so when recognized and asked ques. (Nov. 15) | 1 |
| (j) Monte tells Java how his sleeping embarrassed org. (Nov. 15) | 1 |
| (k) Miguel wants full dress at protest so to look disciplined (Nov. 15) | .5 |

These items can be collected in four clusters:

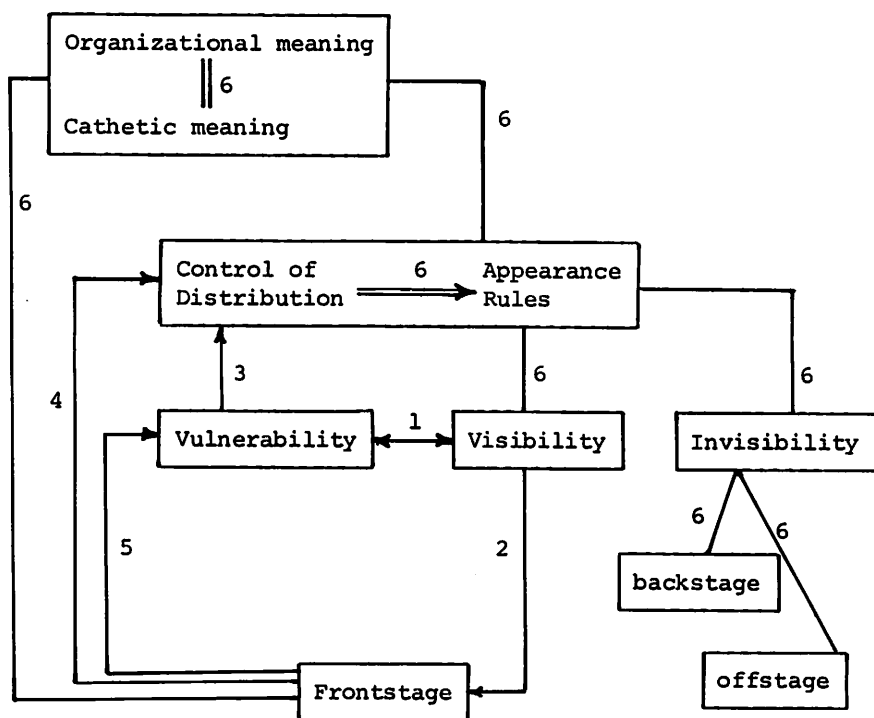
- | | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| (1) proscriptions | (b,d,e) |
| (2) appearances | (a,f,k,i) |
| (3) beret-switching | (c,g,h) |
| (4) vulnerability | (i,j) |

Aside the new relation between frontstage behavior and vulnerability, another lacuna appears when beret-switching, whether

for purposes of frontstage behavior or visibility, occurs. The intent of beret-switching is to become invisible, but the unrevised simple model does not allow this possibility. Thus "invisibility," along with the appropriate "offstage" (private) and "backstage" (closed preparations for frontstage performances) statuses, is also added. Thus refined, a revised dramaturgical model can now be presented.

Figure 2

A Grounded Construct of the Dramaturgy of the Beret



1. general negative reaction (b,f,k,l)
social control (g,h,i,l)
positive reaction (c,m)
2. visibility of "good" and "bad" frontstage behavior (a,j,k,m)
proscriptions (b,d,e)
appearances (a,f,k,i)
3. strategic beret-switching (e,g)
4. proscriptive beret-switching (e,g,h)
5. vulnerability of frontstage behavior (i,j)
6. relations not analyzed in present paper

Placed within the context of this "grounded" dramaturgical model, the modest goals with which I began this paper can now be restated and modified. That the beret was an effective public cue is, at best, a trite argument and would not have been worth the effort if unconnected with other arguments. One can see more clearly now that the very vulnerability which Berets expose themselves to is what makes frontstage behavior so important. There is, in fact, a dramaturgical "vicious circle" formed by the relations between visibility, vulnerability, and frontstage behavior; and the only way to break it is to discard one's uniform.

If the initial statement that behavior varied according to whether one was in "dress" or in street clothes appeared slightly deterministic, it was because, under the old rules, there was no sanctioned way of performing backstage or off-stage routines in a frontstage situation. But rules, like dress, can be refashioned. It was the genius of the developing chapter to formally extend beret-switching from strictly strategic matters to proscriptive ones concerning frontstage behavior. Since proscriptive beret-switching applied to situations where the frontstage rules were about to be broken or had been broken, it made "dress" contingent upon behavior--reversing, in other words, what had apparently been the case previously for the old Beret organization. Thus, Miguel did little to prevent two Berets from slugging it out at a public dance; he merely took off their berets before the fight started, seriously believing that the sudden invisibility of the angry batos would protect the organization. He was wrong. (Oct. 27)

Herein, then, one discovers the fragility of ideological conversion based on ritualism or symbolic dress: there need be no contradiction between commitment to an ideology which is mediated by dress and behavior which ostensibly runs counter to such an ideology. In the case of one Brown Beret chapter, although commitment to the tenet of carnalismo was presumably total, a member was not required to follow the frontstage rules unless he was in dress. Frontstage behavior could be donned and taken off as easily as the beret.

This dramaturgical discussion may have appeared quite tangential to the question of how *lumpenproletariat* individuals become politicized. But demonstrating that ideological commitment and "unconventional" street behavior may involve no apparent contradiction points to a need to strip "politicization" of its conventional "civic" morality. For given the stock scientific view of lower class life, the fact that vacant-lot societies should become "politicized" is an anomalous phenomena: something worth looking at and studying. This anomaly is created basically by three common-sense presumptions shared by most social scientists: (1) that lumpenproletariat are somehow qualitatively different from the "productive" classes; (2) that, therefore, the process of politicization, if and when it occurs, must somehow be intrinsically

different for this type of people; and (3) that politicization to be considered "effective" and "permanent" must somehow transform the previously apathetic, possibly criminal behavior of the street individual to the model behavior of conventional political man (or, at minimum, to anti-social behavior which is politically selective). If anything, the argument in this paper has been to suggest that the relation between politicization and behavior is far from an unambiguous, simple matter.

NOTES

1. The discussion relies solely upon a content analysis of my fieldnotes over a six-month period and does not base itself upon any of my interview material.

2. *Lumpenproletariat* may be a more descriptive term since these batos belonged to the most marginal stratum of the proletariat and, of necessity and preference, relied on the sub-economy for part of their livelihood.

3. One of the most promising aspects of a dramaturgical analogy is that in emphasizing the importance of visibility and symbols it demonstrates the commonality of many disparate phenomena. Limiting ourselves to the Chicano experience, dramaturgy would seem readily appropriate in interpreting the high school blowouts precipitated, at least initially, by conflict over dress codes, the fascination with pachucos (cf., Octavio Paz), and even the zoot-suit pogroms of the 1940's (cf., Turner and Surace).

4. This underestimates the number of people involved in this intense mobilization period, but those not counted--the majority were ex-Berets--were to withdraw, be "terminated," or maintain their membership only peripherally shortly after this period ended. There was, of course, a constant change in membership. The core group itself, though generally stable, lost throughout eight months three members and added three members. The peripheral group, with expectedly ambiguous boundaries, was much more variable in size. However, during the research period it never fell below five nor exceeded ten.

5. Of course it should be noted that levelling each statement to a value of one means that the "quasi-statistical" frequencies cannot tell us the importance of one event relative to another.

6. Coded as a statement indicating cathetic commitment.

7. Although clearly a frontstage statement, it contains no explicit reference to use of the beret and is consequently excluded for coding purposes here.

8. Coded as a statement referring both to frontstage and visibility.

9. Coded as a statement referring to the rules of appearance.

10. The relevant statement coded as reference to rules of appearance.

11. Coded as most clearly referring to rules of appearance.
 12, 13. Although both statements refer to public reaction, no explicit mention of the beret is made and thus they are excluded for coding purposes.

14. Coded as reference to visibility.

15. Coded as reference to organizational control.

16. Although there are two explicit frontstage statements in this excerpt, and reference to beret use is strongly implied in the context, these statements are not coded.

17. A frontstage statement not coded.

18. Coded as reference to rules of appearance.

19. Coded as an observation referring to visibility of the beret. There was no other way the stranger could have recognized us as Berets.

20. Coded as a reference to both rules of appearance and to organizational control.

21. A frontstage statement explicitly linking wearing the beret with public performance. Coded as frontstage.

22. A frontstage statement not explicitly referring to the beret. Uncoded.

23. Coded as referring to both appearance rules and cathetic commitment.

24. The success of this trip must be attributed to the ease with which ten uniformed batos from out-of-town can become an object of attention in a small town. Though obviously indicating the visibility of the group, there are too many confounding variables (the size of the group, being strangers in a small town) to code this as an observation indicating the visibility of the beret.

25. Coded as statement indicating formal meaning.

26. Coded as visibility.

27. Coded as rules of appearance.

28. Rules of appearance.

29. This was difficult to code. Although the connotation is that a beret is something more than a cap, it could also be interpreted in a strict sense as merely a statement of fact. I finally coded it as "other."

30. Coded as "other."

31. Seven of the eight "other" items consisted of theoretical or conceptual comments. There was no apparent variation over time for any of these categories.

32. It should be noted that this freedom from, or relaxation of, public conventions is not distinctive to vacant-lot societies. It characterizes such disparate situations as nudist colonies, smoke-filled backrooms, Camp David, telephone conversations--as Watergate dramatically showed--and master bedrooms. It is sought consciously by utopian communities (sensitivity groups, collectives, monks) as well as by deviant groups. This freedom is basic to what Parsons has called "latent pattern-maintenance," or in the words of a Beret, "para dejarte cayer la greña."

33. Another aspect of offstage behavior involves the barrio's subeconomy, a subject which will not be discussed in the present paper.

34. Rules 5, 7, 9, and 10, may also be considered as "backstage" rules, in the Goffmanian sense of backstage being the place where preparations for the frontstage are made.

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